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**Redefining Nationalism: An examination of the rhetoric, positions and
postures of Asaduddin Owaisi**

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postures of Asaduddin Owaisi**

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Abstract

Redefining Nationalism: An examination of the rhetoric, positions and postures of Asaduddin Owaisi

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Asaduddin Owaisi is the leader of the political party, *All India Majlis-e-Ittehad-ul-Muslimeen*, and also the latest patriarch in a family dynasty stretching at least three generations. Born in Hyderabad in 1969, in the last twelve years, he has gained national prominence as Member of Parliament who espouses Muslim causes more forcefully than any other Indian Muslim. To his devotees, he is the *Naqib-e-Millat*-The Captain of the community. To his detractors he is “communalist” and an “opportunist.” He is an astute political force that is changing the face and tone of Indian politics. This report examines Owaisi’s rhetoric and postures to further study Muslim-Indian identity in the Indian Republic. Owaisi’s calls for the Muslims to uplift themselves also echo the calls of Muhammad Iqbal (d. 1938), the outstanding poet-philosopher who called on Muslims to raise their status in the eyes of God and the world through action, love, and knowledge acquisition. Owaisi is constantly reminding his audience that in spite of the rhetorical similarities he might have with those who called for the creation of Pakistan, he is a firm believer in the existence of the Indian nation state - a nation state that is fair and just to its minorities and does not succumb to a regressive majoritarian mode of governance.

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Introduction:

The Indian political universe has been shaken since the 2014 rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to the national majority position in the Lok Sabha, the Indian Parliament. The loss of the National Congress Party's (Congress) majority and the Prime Minister's seat has been viewed as a turning point for the entire nation and is especially significant for India's Muslim minority. The BJP's Hindu nationalist roots and support places it in historical opposition to many Muslims that remained in India after Partition. In contrast, the Congress Party espouses an ideology of secular nationalism and to this time, most Muslims in the nation, politically, have supported Congress. This paradigm is shifting. Indian Muslims are faced with a persistent identity crisis. They confront a hostile Hindu nationalism or an apathetic secular nationalism. This paper is about how Indian Muslims negotiate these poles and maintain their identity within the Indian democracy.

Aside from a plethora of regional parties, Indian Muslims may have a new voice in the political discourse of the nation. An Indian regional party, the All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen, (AIMIM) translated as the All India Council of Muslims, has made efforts to expand its political representation outside of its base in Hyderabad. AIMIM wishes to be the representative platform for all the Muslims of India. The party's leader, Asaduddin Owaisi, wants the Muslims of India to have a larger political voice within the democratic process. As the leader of the party, he has become a de facto representative of Indian Muslims in television programs, debates and in the Lok Sabha. This paper

examines Owaisi's rhetoric, positions, and political statements in an effort to better clarify the Muslim identity he wishes to represent.

There is an inherent danger in seeking to find representation of an entire community in one person's speeches and opinions. However, Owaisi seeks to represent precisely that community; therefore, it is reasonable to assume that his rhetorical stances and public opinions resonate with a significant portion of Indian Muslims. Otherwise, he would not be trying to present himself as their representative and would not last long on Indian talk shows if he did not have some mass appeal as a Muslim political leader. This paper examines his speeches, public statements, and talk show remarks vis-a-vis three major issues:

1. The Shah Bano Case and the impetus for a Uniform Indian Civil Code.
2. The Babri Masjid Incident in Ayodhya, 1992.
3. Hindu-Muslim Communal Violence throughout India's Post-Colonial history.

These issues display the cultural friction of India's diverse society and may give us a window into the parameters of that specific Indian Muslim identity. The discourse surrounding Kashmir has been omitted from the research of this paper. While Owaisi provides insight into the Kashmir issue as well, the subject is too extensive to be included in this research. It is also acknowledged that Owaisi frequently asserts his views into Kashmiri politics, but he is generally regarded as outside of the local calculus.

Background:

Asaduddin Owaisi is not only the leader of a political party, but also the latest patriarch in a family dynasty stretching at least three generations. He was born in Hyderabad in 1969. In the last twelve years, he has gained national prominence as Member of Parliament who espouses Muslim causes more forcefully than any other Indian Muslim. To his devotees, he is the *naqib-e-millat*-The Captain of the community, the one who issues calls for justice and reform. In 1957, his grandfather took over the leadership of the Majlis-e-Ittehad-ul-Muslimeen (MIM), the precursor to AIMIM.¹ MIM was founded in 1927 in the princely state of Hyderabad by Muslims who were concerned about the fate of their community in a post-British India. The party, in its initial phase, had support from Mir Osman Ali Khan, the Nizam of Hyderabad, and was led by firebrand speakers like Bahadur Yar Jung. The party was instrumental in supporting the Nizam against the incorporation of princely Hyderabad into the Indian nation in 1947. In 1948, the Nizam's rule came to an end by the forces of the independence was removed by the newly-created nation of India and the Majlis party was compelled to refashion itself. It did so under the leadership of Asaduddin's grandfather Abdul Wahid Owaisi and his father Sultan Salahuddin Owaisi. Salahuddin Owaisi, was a six term Member of Parliament (MP) from Andhra Pradesh and former President of the AIMIM.² Asaduddin's brother, Akbaruddin Owaisi, is currently a serving Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) and has an outspoken reputation as a "communalist."³ He is

¹ Farooquee, Neyaz. The Seeker: Asaduddin Owaisi's ambition to unite India's fractured Muslim electorate. *The Caravan*. Delhi Press Patra Prakashan Pvt. Ltd. E-3 Jhandewalan Estate, New Delhi, India. Pg 32,38. September 2016.

² Special Correspondent. A veteran of Many Battles, *The Hindu*. New Delhi, India. 30 September 2008. <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-andhrapradesh/article1348480.ece>.

³ Farooquee, pg 34.

often accused of hate speech and acts of thuggery.⁴⁵ Another brother, Burhanuddin, is the editor of the Party's Urdu language publication. This dynasty is well supported by an entrenched political machine. The AIMIM has founded, administers and supports a range of humanitarian and educational facilities, including a hospital named for the Owaisi family, a medical school, a nursing school, an engineering school, a school of agriculture, girl's primary and secondary schools, and a school of management, all centered in Hyderabad.⁶ AIMIM, in coordination with local religious organizations, runs a sizable charity apparatus through local taxation, donations and central government funding. Clearly, the party and the Owaisi family have solid financial backing. One detractor, Mohammed Ali Shabbir, a political opponent (Congress) from Hyderabad, claims that every vendor in Old Hyderabad is indebted to the Owaisi family and their agents.⁷ Analogies could be made to the Kennedy family in Massachusetts. Since the independence of India and the annexation of Hyderabad into the Indian republic, an Owaisi has been in the leadership, if not the top position, of the AIMIM.

While political dynasties are common in all forms of government, it is of interest that in studies of political dynasties in India, the Owaisis are noticeably absent. In the political examination work *Democratic Dynasties*, AIMIM only receives mention as a

⁴ Hyderabad MLA Akbaruddin Owaisi insulted Hindu Lord Rama and his Mother Kaushalya. 04 January 2013. Retrieved 22 November 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FvsIXVDYbC4>.

⁵ Farooquee, pg 32-33.

⁶ From the AIMIM website. Retrieved 26 October 2016. <http://www.aimim.in/about-the-party/>.

⁷ French, Patrick. Opportunist or rockstar? Owaisi recasting Muslim politics in India. The Hindustan Times. <http://www.hindustantimes.com/india/opportunist-or-rockstar-owaisi-recasting-muslim-politics-in-india/story-b01NPeoH46yXRfUq5UOUSO.html>.

party with little to no ethnic plurality.⁸ The work is devoid of any reference to the lead family of AIMIM, their continuous 67 year political reign, their recent expansions and multi-generational exploits. While the work includes extensive research, data driven regional level models, and long narratives about the Nehru-Gandhi line, it fails to incorporate the Muslim democratic dynasty right under their noses. Any mention of AIMIM is as an ethnic afterthought sequestered in Hyderabad, as if Muslim politics is a subordinate issue.

The peculiar status of Hyderabad's old city itself, also plays a role in Owaisi's politics and electability. Hyderabad, with its steady economic growth and its historically wealthy status among India's princely states, continues to be a major provider towards India's gross domestic product. The city remains a center of learning, of religious scholarship, and is a hub of the Urdu language. According to researchers, Paul Brass and Ashutosh Varshney, Hyderabad is one of the major Indian cities ranked in the top 5 in terms of reoccurring communal violence.^{9,10} The city and surrounding metropolitan area are majority Hindu, but the 2011 census shows a substantial Muslim minority, 43.5%.¹¹ When this is coupled with AIMIM's efforts to represent and enfranchise the Dalit (untouchable/low caste) and Adivasi (aboriginal) communities, Owaisi's political base in Hyderabad is secure.

⁸ Chandra, Kanchan et Al. *Democratic Dynasties, State, Party and Family in Contemporary Indian Politics*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge U.K. 2016. Pg 212.

⁹ Paul R. Brass. *Forms of Collective Violence, Riots, Pogroms and Genocide in Modern India. Three Essays* Collective. Palam Vihar, Gurgaon, Harayana, India, 2006. Pg 21.

¹⁰ Ashutosh Varshney. *Ethnic conflict and Civic Life*. Yale University Press, New Haven CT and London U.K. 2006.

¹¹ Indian Administrative Services, the Census of India 2011. 2011 Census data.

It would be hard to find a better platform for being the national voice of the Muslims of India than being the MP from old Hyderabad. Its Urdu language media broadcasts Owaisi's message via satellite in the lingua franca of India's Muslims. Since the political situation seems solid for Asaduddin Owaisi, he can therefore make his seat in the Lok Sabha the one guaranteed seat for a Muslim in India. Further, many disruptive actions have been done by the elder Owaisi brothers, and there does not seem to have been any negative consequences. In fact, they both have extensive but not criminally conclusive arrest records for assaulting political opponents and government officials.¹² This does not seem to have hurt their electoral chances at all, and they may well have bolstered the Owaisis in the eyes of their constituents.

AIMIM holds no sectarian demands of what being a Muslim actually is. Unlike the current discourse in Pakistan concerning Shias, Ismalis and Sunnis, the AIMIM and Owaisi recognize most Islamic sects as being unquestionably Muslim.¹³ By default, this gives Asaduddin a Jinnah-like quality. After all, the "sole spokesman" was of a Muslim sect that much of Pakistan currently refuses to acknowledge as Muslim, nevertheless he was the sole spokesman of all of India's Muslims as far as the Muslim league and the British Raj were concerned.¹⁴ This lack of sectarian bias gives Asaduddin the ability to garner a broad appeal amongst many variants of Islam in India. This comparison to

¹² Ambrosia, Sabrina. MIM president held in Judicial custody for 2005 Medak abuse case. Arrest records. IBI Times. Retrieved November 2016. <http://www.ibitimes.co.in/mim-president-asaduddin-owaisi-placed-in-judicial-custody-for-2005-medak-abuse-case-426114>.

¹³ Ashok K. Behuria. Sunni-Shia relations in Pakistan: The widening divide. Strategic Analysis. Volume 28. 2004. Pg 157-176 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09700160408450123>.

¹⁴ Jalal, Ayesha. The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan. Cambridge University press. UK. 1985.

Mohammed Ali Jinnah is not the first. Patrick French in *The Hindustan Times*, Tufail Ahmad of *The Indian Express* and Neyaz Farooquee of *The Caravan* have all put the comparison question to Asaduddin, and his answer is telling. Owaisi says that the difference is that unlike Jinnah, he wants to work within the bounds of the Indian Constitution.¹⁵¹⁶¹⁷ In a speech in October 2016 at a mass protest rally at the AIMIM party headquarters, the Darussalam, in Hyderabad, Asaduddin Owaisi made a very poignant remark towards Prime Minister Modi. In Urdu he said, “Modi sir, please remember, try to remember, be sure to remember that we made this disagreement with Mohammed Ali Jinnah before Partition...we are Indians...Modi sir, we know nothing of Mohammed Ali Jinnah Sahib’s ‘two-nation theory’. Those that do, went to Pakistan.”¹⁸ This demonstrates the significant philosophical difference between the “sole spokesman” and Owaisi and gives Owaisi a sense of common identity with Indian Muslims as not only a co-religionist but as citizens who, essentially and for different reasons, remain a faithful remnant in the Indian nation state. This is the pan-Indian-Islamic AIMIM narrative that Owaisi is channeling. He shares a common sense of identity with those who, at a minimum, could not vote with their feet.

¹⁵ Farooquee, Neyaz. The Seeker: Asaduddin Owaisi’s ambition to unite India’s fractured Muslim electorate. *The Caravan*. Delhi Press Patra Prakashan Pvt. Ltd. E-3 Jhandewalan Estate, New Delhi, India. Pg 32,38. September 2016.

¹⁶ French, Patrick. Opportunist or rockstar? Owaisi recasting Muslim politics in India. *The Hindustan Times*. <http://www.hindustantimes.com/india/opportunist-or-rockstar-owaisi-recasting-muslim-politics-in-india/story-b01NPeoH46yXRfUq5UOUSO.html>.

¹⁷ Ratan Mani Lal and Tufail Ahmad. The Indian Express Owaisi-Jinnah comparison. SP sees ‘new Jinnah’ in Owaisi, tells cadres to oppose AIMIM chief’s entry to Uttar Pradesh. 5 August 2015. <http://www.firstpost.com/politics/sp-sees-new-jinnah-in-owaisi-tells-cadres-to-oppose-aimim-chiefs-entry-to-uttar-pradesh-2380568.html>.

¹⁸ Owaisi, Asaduddin. In a speech to the AIMIM supporters, Darusallam, Hyderabad, India October 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XSrMC6NgUaM>

Currently, the only Member of Parliament seat that AIMIM holds is Owaisi's. The Party holds no seats in the Rajya Sabha and maintains seven MLA seats in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh.¹⁹ They have recently expanded their electoral base by winning civic elections in cities and townships beyond Hyderabad. AIMIM holds six civic seats in Karnataka²⁰, two legislative council seats in Maharashtra²¹, and has begun to contest seats in Bihar and Kerala, albeit with no success. Recently, AIMIM opened its party headquarters in Uttar Pradesh (UP) with intent to field candidates in the 2017 elections.²² AIMIM also holds the leadership of the corporations (that is city administration) in and around Hyderabad and holds the Mayor's seat, showing AIMIM to be more than a representative organization but effective at governance at a city level as well. This expansion into other Indian States is a directed campaign to change the idea of Owaisi's role as the representative of Hyderabad into the sole spokesman for Muslims and other oppressed peoples in India. The crux of Owaisi's appeal conveys his pan-Islamist narrative: "Muslims in India are not being represented in the Indian Democracy."

Owaisi claims that historical support for the secular parties of India, namely Congress or the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), by Muslims, has been misplaced, and the

¹⁹ AIMIM official Website. Retrieved October 2016 <http://www.aimim.in/member-of-legislative-assembly/>.

²⁰ Staff Reporter. MIM makes electorate debut in Karnataka. 12 March 2015. Two Circles, Retrieved, October 2016. http://twocircles.net/2013mar12/mim_makes_electoral_debut_karnataka_win_six_seats_civic_polls.html#.WBKMcYWcEcR.

²¹ India Today Staff. Asaduddin makes his Maharashtra results. Two seats in Maharashtra. Indiatoday.in 19 October 2015. New Delhi. <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/maharashtra-election-results-asaduddin-owaisi-mim-warish-yusuf-pathan-imtiyaz-jalil-abdul-gaffar-qadri/1/396654.html/>.

²² AIMIM new Party inauguration in UP. AIMIM Official Website Retrieved October 2016. <http://www.aimim.in/party-president-barrister-asaduddin%e2%80%ac-%e2%80%aa%e2%80%8eowaisi%e2%80%ac-inagurated-aimim-uttar-pradesh-head-office/>.

evidence for this is in the number of Muslim representatives and candidates that are fielded by these parties. In terms of actual representation, 23 Lok Sabha members (MPs) are Muslim out of a total 545 seats. Those 545 seats represent a total population of roughly 1.2 billion people, of which Muslims make up roughly 14.2% at an estimated 172 million.²³ The actual representation is around 4.2%. Asaduddin points out that “of the 23 Muslim MPs who were elected to the Lok Sabha last year, 18 or 19 were elected from a constituency with 30% plus Muslim voters.”²⁴ The remaining population of voters in a district would have some division amongst BJP, Congress and Rashtriya Janata Dal voters or another regional party. For perspective, the BJP won a national majority with 31.3% of the popular vote, coupled with support from regional parties like Shiv Sena in Maharashtra and the Aam Aadmi Party in Delhi.²⁵ In the districts to which Owaisi is referring, the local winning party apparatus, containing all of that original 30% plus Muslims, was obviously majority Muslim, and the candidates would have reflected that. In other words, Congress and the Rashtriya Janata Dal are only fielding Muslim candidates when there is no other choice, and if the secular parties had their druthers, the actual representation of Muslims in the Lok Sabha would be less than 1%. That statistic alone makes Owaisi’s argument compelling, though it is a narrow view of only the national level representation and does not take into account civic and state level representation. Owaisi also cites the findings of the Congress-initiated Sachar committee

²³ Farooquee, Pg 37.

²⁴ French, Patrick. <http://www.hindustantimes.com/india/opportunist-or-rockstar-owaisi-recasting-muslim-politics-in-india/story-b01NPeoH46yXRfUq5UOUSO.html>.

²⁵ Farooquee, Pg 37.

that found drastic disparities in terms of education, employment and earnings between Muslims and other demographic groups.^{26 27}

These developments have given Owaisi the opportunity to take advantage of three operational lines of resentment:

1. The resentment of a lack of representation.
2. The resentment of a lack of prosperity and opportunity.
3. The resentment of being discriminated against by the Hindu nationalists and their new wave of control and incitement.

These resentments have given Owaisi the impetus to demand reservations for Muslims in the Lok Sabha, government jobs and educational positions.²⁸ This notion was rejected in the debate on the making of the Indian Constitution. At the time, Nehru, Azad and Patel agreed that given the violence of Partition and the stigma towards the Muslim community, reservations for Muslims risked further stigmatization and ghettoizing of the community.²⁹ Owaisi believes that Muslims have already been ghettoized, and reservations would ensure representation more commensurate with their population.

²⁶ Farooquee, Pg 37.

²⁷ The Sachar Committee was an Indian government survey commissioned by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh (Congress) in 2005 to determine social, economic, and educational conditions and trends of the Muslim community of India. The survey was chaired by Justice Rajinder Sachar who delivered the committee's final report to the Lok Sabha in November 2006. The report found disparities for Muslims in all categories of measure. Asaduddin Owaisi refers to this report as "non-biased" because it was commissioned by a National Congress Party government.

²⁸ French, Patrick, pg 1-2.

²⁹ Guha, Ramchandra. Indian After Gandhi, The History of the World's Largest Democracy, Shaking the Centre-minding the minorities. HarperCollins Publishers, 10 East 53rd St, New York, NY. Pgs 373-375.

Shah Bano and the impetus for the Uniform Civil Code:

One of the most far reaching controversies in Indian jurisprudence is the Shah Bano case. Shah Bano was a 60-year-old Muslim woman, whose lawyer-husband had divorced her using the controversial method of divorce called triple Talaq. Basically, in this form of divorce (talaq), the husband may say “I divorce you” three times, and then the divorce is final. The divorce is sealed with a one-time payment of the *mahr*, the money or possessions that the representatives of the man and the woman agreed upon when drawing the oral or written marriage contract. In 1986, Shah Bano took her case into the courts demanding “maintenance” beyond the *mahr*, that is financial support, from her former husband. Her case went all the way to the Indian Supreme Court, and the crux of her argument was that her equal treatment under the law was violated since Hindu women who were divorced were entitled to maintenance. The court, citing the Indian Criminal Code, Section 125, found in her favor and made her husband pay a monthly maintenance of a paltry 500 rupees. Congress, then in control of the government, felt a wave of Muslim backlash and enacted the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act of 1986. This act was written as a conciliatory measure. Its main provision gave divorced Muslim women the right to maintenance for (only) the period after divorce, *Iddat*, about three months. This also generated a wave of resentment from Hindu nationalists who have characterized the new law as “appeasement of a minority.”³⁰ The then Chief Justice of India, V.N. Khare, included in his opinion an exhortation to the

³⁰ Shah Bano, The Hindu <http://www.thehindu.com/thehindu/2003/08/10/stories/2003081000221500.htm>.

government to implement a reform to the existing personal codes and develop one uniform civil code as a means of “achieving national integration.” *The Hindu* opines:

“Mr. Khare underlined the curious conflation of issues — women's rights with definitions of the nation-state — in the debate on the civil code. This has triggered strong reaction, especially as it fits rather snugly into the Bharatiya Janata Party's stated position that a uniform civil code is needed to achieve national integration.”³¹

That “conflation of issues” is why, 30 years after the original case, with the actual plaintiff and defendant long dead, this case and the issues it represents will not die. For Muslims then and now, this is a complex but direct cultural attack. This is because of the historic legacy in the separation of communal personal codes. In the early 1950s, with Partition recent, there was a move by the Congress government to make the civil codes more uniform, progressive and just. The result was the Hindu personal codes, which include the *Hindu Undivided Family Law of 1952* providing for maintenance of widows and divorced women, and this was why the court decided Shah Bano as it did. The Hindu and Muslim codes were unequal in their treatment of women because these traditions and precedents were a part of Islamic identity. In many ways, Indian Muslims are fighting the ghosts of Jinnah within this argument. His “two-nation theory” is confirmed in the lack of uniformity in laws for separate communities, and the Hindu nationalists know it. Issues of gender justice, legitimate and loyal citizenship and national integration make the decision far more complex than simply seeking redress for a scorned wife. The very need

³¹ A.M. The Hindu, Shah Bano: the legacy. 10 August 2003.
<http://www.thehindu.com/thehindu/2003/08/10/stories/2003081000221500.htm>.

for a Muslim code, from many perspectives, is counter to the rule of secular nationalism.

How does Owaisi navigate this?

The Rhetoric and representation:

In a mass public protest held at the party's headquarters in Hyderabad in October of 2016, Asaduddin Owaisi answers the BJP government's position on the Shah Bano case and the impetus for a uniform civil code. Owaisi delivers, what he calls a "counter-refutative response." Modi's government issued a 'refutative' response to the Supreme Court decision and outlined policy goals, namely to create a uniform civil code. It is telling that 30 years after the original case and two years into a BJP administration, the Modi administration actively outlines its reasons to pursue this goal.

Owaisi begins his speech in a low monotone, almost-mumble. He thanks high level supporters and gives the usual pious Islamic pre-speech incantations, in the name Allah, etc. He rattles these preemptories off, then as the topic becomes more open, in this case Shah Bano, he picks up speed, intensity and volume. At low level crescendos, he backs off, usually telling a joke or funny anecdote that is sprinkled with Telegu phrases and tongue-in-cheek self-deprecations, and the crowd shouts in acclamation and laughs, as if right on cue. As the plot of the speech goes on, his crescendos are higher, and the crowd's acclamations are louder. There begin to be spontaneous, out of synch shouts of Mashallah (God willed it) and Inshallah (God Willing) that crowd the noise of his speech, and by the end, the crowd is in-frenzied. This is the pattern of Asaduddin's speeches. In Asaduddin's delivery is the ever present idea of an Islamic sermon. Owaisi invokes the

Muslim tradition of oration and rhetoric: *khatabat*. Owaisi echoes the age-old oratory tradition in the line of other Hyderabad orators who had influenced the Majlis in its pre-1948 phase: Bahadur Yar Jung and Rashid Turabi. Turabi, after he migrated to Pakistan, was prominently broadcasted on Radio Pakistan in the 1970s, delivering religious political speeches aimed at both sides of the border. Turabi, a Shii Muslim, would begin a speech the same way that Owaisi does: a familiar verse of the Quran that sets the tone for the entire speech.³² Owaisi legitimizes his speech and his religious appeal by remaining securely in this oratory tradition. Asaduddin's command of the discourse surrounding the Islamic sphere is coupled with his use of the Urdu language, both formal and colloquial, giving Owaisi a great deal of local credence. Asaduddin's other facet of delivery is his secular education. Owaisi received training as a lawyer at Lincoln's Inn in London after completing his education at Hyderabad's prestigious secondary and post-secondary institutions. In many TV debates and in his Lok Sabha profile, he is referred to as "Barrister Asaduddin Owaisi."³³ This blend of elite English education coupled with a solid base in Urdu and Islamic oratory gives Owaisi a gravitas among his constituency. Owaisi convinces his audience of his personal command of the discourse of Islamic communities.

As a London-trained lawyer, Owaisi is systematic in the demolition of Prime Minister Modi's argument. He brings the crowd to specific pages and repeats what Modi

³² Hyder, Syed Akbar. *Reliving Karbala: Martyrdom in South Asian Memory*. Oxford University Press, 198 Madison Avenue, New York, NY. 2006. Pgs 40-42.

³³ Lok Sabha Profile of Barrister Asaduddin Owaisi. Retrieved 22 November 2016. <http://www.archive.india.gov.in/govt/loksabhampbiodata.php?mpcode=4091>.

has said and offers it as a “post-mortem.” The beginning of the refutation brings out an interesting trope that must now be examined. Modi’s policy refutation lists the names of nations and the date in which those nations inaugurated a uniform civil code. Of those nations, 23 are majority Muslim nations of which Modi makes note. In another incident, Owaisi was in a debate over the Shah Bano case with six other debaters, on the live Television program, *Halla Bol* on NDTV. While the debaters spoke, the ticker on the bottom of the screen, written in Hindi, flashes the flags of nations and the date in which each nation accepted a uniform civil code.³⁴ There does seem to be an elite inference that India is not keeping up with the progress of the rest of the world. If India has lost its place in the world, then who is responsible? This is an intentional narrative about Indian Muslims, and included in this is the fact that Pakistan is one of those Muslim nations that has already enacted a uniform civil code. In his speech, this is the first issue he addresses since Pakistan tends to be the yardstick by which Indian Muslims are measured. Asaduddin goes down the list, delivering a commentary and critique of each Muslim country. The only nation that does not receive some insult or criticism is Indonesia. Asaduddin simply says, “Indonesia, (pause)...theek hey (ok), that is the best example” which could be an insult in and of itself.³⁵ Prominent in this diatribe is Pakistan, just as it is prominent in the discourse presented by Modi and the Hindutva. Asaduddin gives a resolute refutation. As previously mentioned, he reminds the Prime Minister that Indian Muslims are Indians, and then says, “Pakistan.....Pakistan? (higher pitched and

³⁴ Halla Bol, NDTV. Asaduddin Owaisi channel, YouTube. 19 October 2016. Retrieved November 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SdnMgfgFdoc>.

³⁵ India Today-Youtube, Asaduddin Owaisi, Shah Bano speech. October 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XSrMC6NgUaM>.

questioning)...you give Pakistan as an example? Pakistan is not even a functioning democracy, Modi Sahib.”³⁶ Later in his diatribe, “You should see Pathankot Modi Sahib,” a harsh reference to a terrorist attack in Punjab and an attempt to distance himself further from Pakistan. At this point, he delivers the aforementioned phrase, “we know nothing of Mohammed Ali Jinnah ’s ‘two-state theory,’ those that do went to Pakistan. Those who stayed stand before you now to contest you.”³⁷ This statement is aimed at more than Hyderabad Muslims, especially since so many Muslims in Hyderabad were not even a part of the Indian nation state at the time of Partition. Owaisi is trying to mobilize the entire Muslim electorate. “Modi has deliberately forgotten this by using Pakistan as an example. Mr. Modi Sahib, remember, please remember, and be sure to remember that before this Partition we made our disagreement with Jinnah.” In the speech, after his ridicule of each country, Owaisi comes to a conclusion. “What are you doing, Modi Sahib?” He opines, “In all of these countries, except Turkey, one can have two marriages. Two wives!” He exclaims and begins to giggle. “What are you really trying to say, Mr. Modi? Mr. Modi, no, you cannot have a second marriage,” he explains. The crowd cheers.³⁸

Gleaning the contradictions of the Hindu Nationalists:

³⁶ Shah Bano Speech. India Today-Youtube, Asaduddin Owaisi, Shah Bano speech. October 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XSrMC6NgUaM>.

³⁷ Shah Bano Speech. India Today-Youtube, Asaduddin Owaisi, Shah Bano speech. October 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XSrMC6NgUaM>.

³⁸ Shah Bano Speech. India Today-Youtube, Asaduddin Owaisi, Shah Bano speech. October 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XSrMC6NgUaM>.

At this point, Owaisi pulls back the momentum and jokes with the crowd. “Ah, the 5-year-old boy in shorts is now 90 years old, but just to hold your pants, you need a belt.” This is a clever reference to an internal contradiction of the BJP feeder organization, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). Since the time of the British Raj, the members of the RSS have worn a uniform with khaki shorts. In 2010, the organization switched from canvas belts to more stylish leather belts. This caused a nation-wide shortage in leather belts. This shortage is also exacerbated by state and local laws, endorsed by Hindutva organizations, like the RSS, that ban cow slaughter. The implementation took two years, and in 2015, the RSS decided to abandon the shorts for pants, but not the leather belt.³⁹ This is one of the many contradictions Owaisi notes about his opponents. Owaisi rails against bans on cow slaughter in Gujarat, Maharashtra, Haryana and UP, but notes that in the same states, Muslims and low caste people have been lynched and beaten over the discourse of cow slaughter. This theme is consistent across his speeches and works. On the AIMIM website he criticizes the “Hindutva Agenda.” He notes that a Muslim man in Jharkhand was killed on the mere suspicion of cow slaughter, and more recently, “a September 28th lynching of a Muslim man, Mohammed Akhlaq, in Uttar Pradesh over rumours that he ate beef.” The article reports, “This is a family whose son is protecting the Indian skies from external enemies referring to Akhlaq’s son who is with the Indian Air Force.”⁴⁰ This is another slam at the questionable loyalty narrative and is a perfect contradiction for Owaisi to bring out.

³⁹ Rowlatt, Justin. *Why India's Hindu nationalists are shedding their shorts*. The British Broadcasting Corporation, London U.K. 5 November 2015. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-34718691>.

⁴⁰ Owaisi, Asaduddin. Without Secularism there can be no India. October 2016 AIMIM Official Website. <http://www.aimim.in/without-secularism-there-can-be-no-india-asaduddin-owaisi-ians/>.

Owaisi also loves to point to the prohibition of alcohol and the ban of any animal slaughter in Gujarat. On another TV show, Owaisi points out that while Congress and the BJP agreed to allow the end of cow slaughter in most Indian States, they simultaneously allowed the importation of animal slaughter devices with import duties of “only 10 or 6 percent.”⁴¹ He uses this trope in many speeches and debates. “You can prohibit alcohol in Gujarat but not the killing of innocents? You can ban the killing of animals but still kill people? We have seen your help in Gujarat.”⁴²

Piety as performance:

In representations and studies of Asaduddin Owaisi, the most trodden trope is his performance of piety. Farooquee and French both make contrasts of the “Sarkari Muslims” (that is government ‘Congress’ Muslims) and the overt Islamic displays of Asaduddin. They point out his dress, his beard, his *topi*, prayer cap, and his overt use of Islamic language and phraseology.^{43,44} More to the point, why should Owaisi be questioned on the wearing of the garb that marks him Muslim? Prime Minister Modi tends to wear Gujarati apparel. Sashi Tharoor wears Kerala apparel. Man Mohan Singh wears his Sikh Pagri and Sumrita Mahajan wears her sari and bindi as a mark of Hinduism but none of these politicians have been interrogated about this as a contradiction. Farooquee makes the point that his speech omits high religious concepts and remains simple. This seems

⁴¹ Rajaat Sharma. *Ap Ki Adalat*, Asaduddin Owaisi episode, 22 September 2014. 13:29-13:45. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ffkf3tosmKw&t=1717s>.

⁴² India Today-Youtube, Asaduddin Owaisi, Shah Bano speech. October 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XSrMC6NgUaM>.

⁴³ French, 1-2.

⁴⁴ Farooquee 34-35.

true. In his speeches, the references to the Quran, besides using it as a basis for legal reference, are simple platitudes that any illiterate person with a mild Islamic association could recognize. Owaisi tailors his rhetoric for mass appeal. For Farooquee, however, the main contradiction is that despite his overt piety, Owaisi goes out of his way to criticize the Indian Ulama (scholars).⁴⁵ Owaisi criticizes other Muslims and Muslim countries, and he never misses an opportunity to demand that actual terrorists be prosecuted. He condemns global jihadi networks like the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS / DAESH) and the many variants of Al Qaeda.⁴⁶ At the same time, Akbaruddin (the brother) has been accused of terrorist threats and inciting violence.⁴⁷ Asaduddin himself makes a habit of racing to the scene of communal violence and being very involved with this, and in some cases arrested for abetting violence.⁴⁸ This is the contradiction for Farooquee that requires his attention. This misconflated notion of terrorism and violence should be deconstructed. Asaduddin is not promoting terrorism by encouraging self-defense of his community. By condemning Pakistan and ISIS, Asaduddin declares them, in his righteous and overt piety, as an “other.” Being the supposed representative of Muslims in India, Owaisi gives Muslims a separation from the narrative now being co-opted by Hindu nationalists and supported in print media.⁴⁹ That narrative, that all violence around

⁴⁵ Farooquee. 33

⁴⁶ Shah Bano response by Owaisi 19 October 2016. India Today-Youtube, Asaduddin Owaisi, Shah Bano speech. October 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XSrMC6NgUaM>.

⁴⁷ Farooquee. 34

⁴⁸ French 2

⁴⁹ Usharani Narayana and Priti Kapur. Indian Media Framing of the image of Muslims: An Analysis of News Coverage of Muslims in English Newspapers of India. Media Asia, VOL 38 NO 3. 2011. Pgs 153-163

Muslims is the product of terrorism, is an intentional obfuscation designed to redefine what citizenship in a secular India means.

Further in his Shah Bano Protest speech, Owaisi notes that “on all the channels from 9:00 PM to 06:00 AM, the T.V. shows say that India is becoming a Muslim country or that India is producing its own Taliban.”⁵⁰ Owaisi is tapping into a very real perception that the media, government and right wing structures of India are scapegoating Muslims. According to Paul Brass and Ashutosh Varshney, political movements have capitalized on communal resentment and violence for electoral ends, especially in places like Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh.^{51 52} Owaisi demonstrates how this resentment is capitalized by the Hindu nationalists opposing him.

The larger contradiction that both French and Farooquee have missed is that Owaisi is an overt Islamist and simultaneous adherent of secularism. In 2015, AIMIM published Asaduddin’s interview with the Indo-Asian News Service (IANS) in a public press release entitled “*Without Secularism, there can be no India.*” In it Owaisi calls the AIMIM, in no uncertain terms, “not a Muslim Party.”⁵³ “AIMIM may be a political party that takes up the cause of not only Muslims but also Dalits and other weaker sections. It’s not a Muslim party” as Owaisi says.⁵⁴ The very fact that AIMIM’s name is the “All India

⁵⁰ India Today-Youtube, Asaduddin Owaisi, Shah Bano speech. October 2016.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XSrMC6NgUaM>.

⁵¹ Paul R. Brass. Forms of Collective Violence, Riots, Pogroms and Genocide in Modern India. Three Essays Collective. Palam Vihar, Gurgaon, Harayana, India, 2006. Pg 36-41.

⁵² Ashutosh Varshney. Ethnic conflict and Civic Life. Yale University Press, New Haven CT and London U.K. 2006.

⁵³ Without Secularism, there can be no India. Asaduddin Owaisi. AIMIM website. November 2016.

<http://www.aimim.in/without-secularism-there-can-be-no-india-asaduddin-owaisi-ians/>.

⁵⁴ Ibid. <http://www.aimim.in/without-secularism-there-can-be-no-india-asaduddin-owaisi-ians/>.

Council of Muslims” seems to contradict Asaduddin’s statement but he says that his party is not just a Muslim party. Asaduddin says, “It (AIMIM) undoubtedly wants the development of the largest minority of the land but to brand it a party of a specific religion is totally wrong.”⁵⁵ Members of the BJP have called for the banning of the AIMIM as “communalist and sectarian.” Owaisi responds with, “Who has given them (critics) the right to call ME secular or communal or anti-national? These people do not hold intellectual rights over nationalism or secularism.”⁵⁶ Owaisi continues in praise of his party, “Here is a political party doing everything to create more confidence to strengthen Indian democracy. You can disagree with my politics. You have got all the right, but do not say, do not participate in democracy.”⁵⁷ Asaduddin Owaisi is creating a middle space for Indian Islamic identity as Muslims but particular in its acceptance of India as its nation.

In Asaduddin’s grand protest of Shah Bano, he brings up the contradiction of Secularism in India by invoking the beef bans in Maharashtra, which are clearly religiously motivated.⁵⁸ He also brings up the founding of a museum in Ayodhya which bears the name of Lord Ram built by the state. “But the state has no religion,” Owaisi says nodding his head to bring out the contradiction.⁵⁹ Repeatedly, Owaisi reads section 80 of the Indian Constitution, “India is a secular socialist nation etc.” Owaisi makes his

⁵⁵ Ibid. <http://www.aimim.in/without-secularism-there-can-be-no-india-asaduddin-owaisi-ians/>.

⁵⁶ Ibid. <http://www.aimim.in/without-secularism-there-can-be-no-india-asaduddin-owaisi-ians/>.

⁵⁷ Ibid <http://www.aimim.in/without-secularism-there-can-be-no-india-asaduddin-owaisi-ians/>.

⁵⁸ India Today-Youtube, Asaduddin Owaisi, Shah Bano speech. October 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XSrMC6NgUaM>.

⁵⁹ India Today-Youtube, Asaduddin Owaisi, Shah Bano speech. October 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XSrMC6NgUaM>.

Muslim audience feel as though they are under attack from a Hindu majority and he has ample evidence to support this.

Owaisi participated in a debate on the TV program, previously mentioned, *Halla Bol*, with six other debaters. Owaisi was asked about the Uniform Civil Code. Asaduddin obfuscated around the issue and attempted to bring up examples of hypocrisy and the internal contradictions of the opposition. Owaisi brought up child labor, which he says is a violation of the Indian Constitution Article 39F and the directive principles of the Constitution. He points out that the *1952 Hindu Family Act* allows families to employ children as labor. The act also gives tax rebates to Hindu families. “Is this just?” he asks. “My question to the government is about Article 39c of the Indian Constitution in regards to Dalits and Nagas.”⁶⁰ This is Owaisi’s effort to bring in the OBC community into the argument. He continues to note examples of Hindutva internal hypocrisy. He notes the 2005-2006 *Indian Marriage Survey* saying that the survey found polygamy was practiced by both Hindus and Muslims and that “84% of child marriages were Hindu Marriages.”⁶¹ He repeats these numbers for effect. This is an interesting point that Owaisi makes. On the one hand, the raw, unadulterated words would leave the casual observer thinking that Hindu culture might have a substantial problem with child marriages. When this notion is interrogated, Owaisi’s 84% is only slightly higher than the proportion of India’s Hindu population, 80%.⁶² This is to say that Hindus have child marriages at a rate generally

⁶⁰ Hala Bol. NDTV debate Halla Bol, NDTV. Asaduddin Owaisi channel, YouTube. 19 October 2016. Retrieved November 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SdnMgfgFdoc>.

⁶¹ IBID. Halla Bol, NDTV debate

⁶² Indian Administrative Service. The Census of India 2011. New Delhi. <http://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011census/C-01.html>.

commensurate with their proportion of the population. What Owaisi does not mention is the Muslim rate of child marriages, which is most likely around 15%, their proportion of the population. He wants the listener to glean from his words that Hindus have abnormal marriage practices.

Further context reveals that in this same debate, another Muslim debater, Zakia Soman, who is an activist working for the abolition of Triple Talaq, is also asked to give her opinion of the Uniform Civil Code. Her point of view is considerably different than Asaduddin's outlook. She demands "Gender Justice." When asked about the code she responds:

My opinion is that the issue is absolutely clear. What are today's Muslim women in India demanding? They want adherence to the Quran...they ask if Triple Talaq is not in the Quran, then why is it in practice? They are asking to follow the Quran and to stop politicizing the Quran and religion. The secular law allows religious marriages; therefore, we support religious marriages for every citizen. The Law Commission took the right step. The Uniform Civil Code is not an either/or issue. The issue is to follow the Quran according to the law. We demand gender justice as in the Quran.

Owaisi nods in agreement. He has to, and he has to tread very lightly with this issue and this activist. This is because the packaging of the BJP's argument has become centered and grafted onto the issue of gender justice. Shah Bano's argument was as much about equality as about gender justice. Owaisi is masterful at navigating this trope. He refers to Shah Bano respectfully as "Sister Shah Bano." He proudly makes a point for AIMIM to fund girl's schools, orphanages, and colleges. One bill Owaisi has submitted demands an end to the Indian Haj subsidy and redirects the money towards scholarships

for girls.⁶³ To further align his position, he begins to speak but is finally interrupted by the moderator who makes the question very direct. “Do we need a Uniform Civil Code, and why or why not?” Owaisi responds, “We do not need a Uniform Civil Code. We need uniform application of the Criminal Code.” This is Owaisi’s most succinct answer to this question. He goes on to say that the impetus for the code is simply a part of the “Hindutva Agenda,” and that the BJP was politicizing religion. He further explains that different interpretations of Islam have different opinions and rulings with different traditions. “Look,” he says. “In Islam, marriage is a contract. In Hinduism, marriage is a religious rite.” This is a point which gives Owaisi a great deal of ideological maneuverability. It seems to suggest that rites such as Triple Talaq, which Owaisi defends as an Islamic institution, can change or not exist in all Islamic relationships because the relationship is simply contractual. Criminal law application would theoretically prevent child marriage, divorce without compensation and other issues of gender and justice. “We also need gender justice,” Owaisi admits. This places him in a nuanced position, supporting gender justice but not promoting a Uniform Civil Code. He has created this space for the Muslims of India to fill, sympathetic and seeking justice but not conflating an issue of justice with a passive-aggressive attack that is miss-associated with justice.

In the Modi government’s position, Owaisi notes that *The International covenant on Civil and Political Rights* is often quoted. The crux of the government’s position is a

⁶³ Farooquee 33.

demand for justice. Modi takes this document, a nonbinding international declaration of principle, not law, and uses its words to press his own political agenda. Owaisi says, “Self-determination is also a directing principle of *The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, Modi Sahib,” to adoring cheers. This is a difficult assertion. Who is needing to have self-determination? Owaisi’s argument is that Muslims, lacking representation, have no self-determination, but this is conjuring the ghost of Mohammed Ali Jinnah by promoting the otherness of the Indian Muslim. Paradoxically, to be a loyal Indian, Asaduddin must scorn the two-nation theory, though its antecedents are evident in the very arguments he must make. Owaisi requires separateness of cultures if he is to make any political headway outside of Hyderabad. Later in this same speech he further makes this point, “Dalits, Other Backwards Castes and Tribes, Buddhists, Christians and Muslims each have their own culture.”⁶⁴ “In Haryana, two Muslim children had their throats cut; did they remember Article 9 of *The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*?”⁶⁵ “Keep the government out of our homes, Modi Bhai.”⁶⁶

Owaisi narrates a comic anecdote in which he finds a friend at a Five-Star hotel with a woman who is not his wife. Owaisi gets the crowd laughing about this and explains that polygamy doesn’t mean that affairs will not happen. “You do not need to have two marriages,” he says laughing. “The blame goes to Muslims, Muslims, and Muslims about gender justice. You, you, you..(he makes his hands in a whirlwind sign),

⁶⁴ Shah Bano grand protest. 47:20-47:32. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XSrMC6NgUaM>.

⁶⁵ Shah Bano grand protest. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XSrMC6NgUaM>.

⁶⁶ Ibid. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XSrMC6NgUaM>.

but we do not have enough food to eat.”⁶⁷ “The percentage of people who are starving in this country is great,” he says. “You might think we would be #2 or #3 country or #10 on feeding our people, 97th. 97 is our number!”

One example of an internal Civil Code is the post-colonial state of Goa whose, civil code is cited by the Modi government. “Signed 25 years prior as an example of marriage, but (within it) a child can be married. It is not the woman’s responsibility, it’s your responsibility (Modi)”; the crowd cheers. “I reject the RSS comparison and Hindutva agenda. This is not about secularism. If it was they would not be attacking marriage.”⁶⁸

Asaduddin brings his positions together saying,

Shah Bano did not say listen to your wife. Allah says listen to your wife!” Look, if you are a Barelvi, be a Barelvi, If you are a Deobandi, be a Deobandi, if you are a Salafi, keep being a Salafi, if you are Shia, then continue to be Shia, but my brothers, please remember we must now stop these ideological disputes. Stop this non-sense please and listen to your wives as the Quran instructs. This is only Allah’s work.⁶⁹

Then Owaisi opines about identity,

We must save our country, we must save our identity, we must save our honor, our religion, our law, but Islam cannot save our burqa? The government is incorrect, mistaken, false in its assumptions. Shah Bano was a court case. Perhaps in 1986, it was a domestic violence case. The 1986 Act and the Supreme Court ruling was a benefit (result), and it said that if a wife would be divorced, then she

⁶⁷ Shah Bano protest. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XSrMC6NgUaM>.

⁶⁸ Shah Bano Protest. India Today-Youtube, Asaduddin Owaisi, Shah Bano speech. October 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XSrMC6NgUaM>.

⁶⁹ Shah Bano Protest. India Today-Youtube, Asaduddin Owaisi, Shah Bano speech. October 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XSrMC6NgUaM>.

would go to her parents, but Sister Shah Bano was old and her relatives all gone. What was Shah Bano to do? This is a violation of the penal code.⁷⁰

In a different speech, not concerned directly with the Shah Bano Case, Owaisi goes much further

We should not send sisters out (expel or banish). When our sister criticizes us, we should not get on Youtube and humiliate and shame her. If we are shaming our sisters, how can we possibly invite people into our religion? The first person to accept our religion, Islam, was our mother Khadija (the prophet's first wife). The first person to be sacrificed (martyred) for Islam was a woman.⁷¹

This passage is critical to how Owaisi reconstructs the narrative of gender justice.

Owaisi deflects constant external critiques of Islam and himself by those who are struggling against a patriarchy. Likewise, Owaisi has a community-internal issue with patriarchy. Asaduddin actively chastises his own community's failings. Owaisi devotes much emotional energy in this speech to reveal the perception of grievance. Why is Owaisi attempting to address his fellow Muslim's behavior? After all, much of his rhetoric focuses on the blame heaped on Muslims for things they as a group have little to do with. Previously, we see Owaisi speaking ill of the Ulama; now he seems to be giving into the narrative of Islamic violence against women. He corrects his fellow Muslims in an Iqbalian attempt to actually become the speaker for Muslims. He is simultaneously a political leader as well as religious leader. This style of Imam cum Politico may be something all his own. In terms of being a legitimate Islamic scholar he may not entirely qualify. As Owaisi himself notes, Sunni Islam has no priesthood.⁷² This research has not

⁷⁰ Shah Bano Protest. India Today-Youtube, Asaduddin Owaisi, Shah Bano speech. October 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XSrMC6NgUaM>.

⁷¹ Babri Masjid Protest 17:15-18:30 12 January 2014. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eXvHa_0krYc.

⁷² Farooquee 37

yielded any evidence of Asaduddin Owaisi issuing a Fatwa (religious decree), nor is Owaisi claiming to be a member of the Ulama. In an age where there is instant internet-Ulama with websites in the Islamic world like haramornot.com and askanimam.com, Owaisi may have as much legitimate religious standing as any of these instant Ulama.⁷³ This legitimacy may be a requirement for the position. If we could interrogate Owaisi, we would find that Owaisi acknowledges that injustices are being done with traditional religious practices as an excuse. His premise is that religion is being used as a tool of hate against Muslims. Issues like the Shah Bano case or cases of Triple Talaq should be dealt with in the criminal realm and not civil courts. This ensures justice, especially gender justice being sought, and is already codified in the criminal law. Owaisi represents many Islamic communities, and by extension, OBC communities. In his *Halla Boll* remarks, he acknowledges the variances in religious findings concerning divorce in Islam. His own opinion may be that Muslims have been targeted. While they are being targeted, it is difficult to be reflective or reformative to repair those cultural or societal injustices. Rather, these communities are focused on resentment because of constant external prodding and pressure. As long as that continues to be the case, the Muslims of India will remain second class citizens.

⁷³ Haramornot.com and askanimam.com

Babri Masjid:

On 06 December 1992, the Babri Mosque (Masjid) at Ayodhya was destroyed by a Hindu mob, which claimed that the location the mosque was built on was the birthplace of Lord Ram. This mob hacked down the mosque by hand with shovels and pick-axes in a matter of hours. The issue of the ownership/use of the land had been disputed through legal suits, and at the time was under the review of the Supreme Court of India. Until that time, a wave of antagonistic actions occurred causing Police to separate Muslims from the site. The Masjid, a Mughal structure estimated to be around 500 years old, was not then actively used for worship services. The issue remains visceral 24 years later. AIMIM holds political rallies on the anniversary of the destruction of the Masjid. Asaduddin uses the occasion to further his agenda. In a short ABP news report of the Babri Masjid anniversary, Owaisi delivers a speech. “God willing, we will rebuild every brick. We will defeat Mohin Bhagwat’s dream. We have the trust of the Supreme Court, and of the Constitution.”⁷⁴ Owaisi means to coalesce Muslims into a political block, and deep in his rhetoric are familiar tropes of resentment and ghettoization that need exploration.

Blame:

Within his rhetoric, Owaisi swims in notions of blame. He points to government members, such as Mohin Bhagwat, who blame Muslims themselves for fanning the hatred which destroyed the Masjid.⁷⁵ He explains his case as that of all the Muslims of

⁷⁴ ABP Live India News. Retrieved October 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iRd9PPcHvUo>.

⁷⁵ Asaduddin Owaisi Latest Powerful Speech On Babri Masjid At Darussalam on 02/12/2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JhuestDM6OY>.

India. “We had a court case, we were not extreme, tell me what we did? In February 1986 our Babri Masjid was opened without notice and the decision not told to us by the court ahead of time. It was not on a computer but being typed on a typewriter, and the court could have waited ten minutes to (publish) its order; meanwhile, the decision was made. Then on 6 December 1992 our Masjid was martyred. We saw and the whole world saw...The court decided to take the ‘title dispute’, these are not my words, they are the court’s words...the Supreme Court said that the High Court has given a strange judgment. The court gave a stay. Then the court said that the Muslims needed tolerance, the Muslims need to be patient, the Muslims need to do this. We are lectured that the Muslims need so and so and to do this and that; we are asking them now for 70 years, have the Muslims received justice?”⁷⁶ Later Owaisi expands on notions of conspiracy and resentment:

“prior to 6 December they planned to destroy the masjid; these are not my words but Prasad has written them in his book. In [Lalu] Prasad’s books it says the Congress Chief Minister aided in this; these are not my words but are written in Prasad’s book. Our mosque was martyred, sacrificed for secularism.”⁷⁷⁷⁸

For Owaisi, the notion of intentionality within the Hindu nationalist movement is critical. By pointing out the planning of Bhagwat and the possible collusion of Congress members to destroy the masjid, Owaisi is fomenting the idea of a nebulous, changing, plotting and not always identifiable anti-Muslim movement that would appear to be much

⁷⁶ Asaduddin Owaisi Latest Powerful Speech On Babri Masjid At Darussalam on 02/12/2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JhuestDM6OY>.

⁷⁷ Asaduddin Owaisi Latest Powerful Speech On Babri Masjid At Darussalam on 02/12/2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JhuestDM6OY>.

⁷⁸ Asaduddin refers to “Prasad’s book.” It is possible he means Lalu Prasad Yadav, Rashtriya Janata Dal leader, however the research has not demonstrated any book written about the incident by Lalu Prasad. It is unclear who Asaduddin Owaisi is referring to.

bigger than meets the eye. Indeed, there is ample evidence of this in numerous sectarian killings and communal riots. Reexamining the aforementioned work of Brass and Varshney, the broader conceptual picture becomes clearer. Paul Brass's work on Communal Violence, a process he calls Institutional Riot Systems (IRS), was an answer to the idea that communal violence was a flashpoint phenomenon. In other words, the prior notion was that riots and pogroms occurred spontaneously because of communal resentments and often as the result of some personal dispute that became grafted onto larger communal struggles. Paul Brass's work, which focuses on circumstantial data delivered voluntarily in violence prone areas, suggests that there was more to the phenomenon. He recognized that certain districts always had communal riots in the pre-election season.⁷⁹ Later, Ashutosh Varshney added to this by examining the level of civic institutions and came to a formulaic answer. Certain districts, with high but not exaggerated Muslim populations living in Hindu majorities where civic structures interfaced with society, supported communal riots as a method to coalesce voting blocks, typically for the benefit of Hindu Nationalists.⁸⁰ While Owaisi's position is nuanced, he naturally points to hatred and a lack of tolerance repeatedly. He also normalizes the notion that communal violence is part of a broader pre-planned attack on Muslims for greater political control by Hindutva forces. This is mutually beneficial to AIMIM. For all of the political life of India, Muslims have looked on Congress as their party. For a Congress Minister to be, serendipitously, implicated in the most symbolic communal

⁷⁹ Paul R. Brass. *Forms of Collective Violence, Riots, Pogroms and Genocide in Modern India*. Three Essays Collective. Palam Vihar, Gurgaon, Harayana, India, 2006. Pg 17-21.

⁸⁰ Ashutosh Varshney. *Ethnic conflict and Civic Life*. Yale University Press, New Haven CT and London U.K. 2006.

attack on Muslims, strikes a blow to any notions that people outside of co-religionists can be trusted.

Central to tropes of blame and resentment is the rhetoric about Owaisi and the AIMIM. The Congress leader, Lalu Prasad Yadav has accused Owaisi of being “an RSS agent,” implying that he is taking needed Muslim votes away from Congress.⁸¹ Amit Shah (Congress) said Owaisi is a bigger threat in Bihar than BJP, a statement which is less true in actual political/electoral reality and more about coalescing support.⁸² In another media source, Owaisi asks people to come to events and ask questions rather than being stereotyped.⁸³ Owaisi notes the Prime Minister and Congress leaders such as Mulayam Singh Yadav are having two hour meetings with leaders of the RSS and the Vishva Hindu Parishad.⁸⁴ Further in this trope, Owaisi speaks about heaps of blame on the Muslim community and himself.

Digvijay Singh, sir (Congress Leader), you have had three governments in Madhya Pradesh. There have been three BJP governments also. Why have these not worked? That is my responsibility (fault)! You came home and your water buffalo did not provide milk. That is my responsibility (fault)! In your home your chicken does not crow in the morning. It's as if you think I am a witch doctor practicing magic on your chicken. For so many years, why have you formed so many governments in Madhya Pradesh? Please answer. This is my responsibility

⁸¹Sharma, Supryia. Lalu accuses Owaisi of being an RSS agent Sunday interview, Keen to expand his national footprint, Owaisi says he's not an RSS agent All India Majlis-e-Ittehad-ul Muslimeen chief insists that he isn't a 'coolie of secularism' either 15 May 2015. <http://scroll.in/article/711643/keen-to-expand-his-national-footprint-owaisi-says-hes-not-an-rss-agent>.

⁸² Farooquee, pg 35.

⁸³ Asaduddin Owaisi Latest Powerful Speech On Babri Masjid At Darussalam on 02/12/2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JhuestDM6OY>.

⁸⁴Rajaat Sharma. Ap Ki Adalat, Asaduddin Owaisi, 22 September 2014. 11:10-13:10. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ffkf3tosmKw>.

(fault)? When was the last Muslim MP from Madhya Pradesh? DigVijay Singh, you speak against Muslims...what are you trying to stop? ⁸⁵

Owaisi is riding the line of resentment but also making the blame placed on Muslims his own. He explains, “Look, our homes have been burnt, our mosques are gone. Sadar Patel, now his name is famous, but he was communal, bloody. They punish Muslims for not going to Pakistan.” ⁸⁶

In another part of the Barbri Masjid speech he points to the fact that Gujarati communities need “drinking water lines.” “We need drinking water lines, but we will surely get new police stations.” Owaisi also points out that a Muslim in Gujarat cannot carry a bag or luggage onto the metro lines. ⁸⁷ This is Owaisi revealing the Hindu Mahasabha’s real intention: to speak for a narrative of security and separateness towards the Muslims of India. He thus claims to prove the ghettoization of his people.

Whereas Asaduddin Owaisi projects himself through measured rhetoric, his brother Akbaruddin Owaisi is more direct in articulating language offensive to Hindus. He also uses rhetoric as his main political weapon. If Asaduddin is prone to hyperbole and personal attacks, Akbaruddin is exponentially worse. The wealth of communal and insensitive speeches attributed to Akbaruddin Owaisi is too much to fully research in this paper. One anecdote is appropriate to demonstrate how Owaisi manipulates the extreme

⁸⁵ Asaduddin Owaisi Latest Powerful Speech On Babri Masjid At Darussalam on 02/12/2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JhuestDM6OY>.

⁸⁶ All India Majlis-E-Ittehadul Muslimeen Official (AIMIM) & Political News, Asaduddin Owaisi Bold Speech On Babri Masjid 01-12-2014. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eXvHa_0krYc.

⁸⁷ Babri Masjid 2015 speech.

elements of the Muslim Community. In a televised speech in Hyderabad, Akbaruddin addresses the Babri Masjid issue by pointing out that the site was not the only supposed birthplace of Lord Ram. The speech begins with Akbaruddin Owaisi invoking Ram Jethmalani, a lawyer and a BJP MP who famously criticized Lord Ram for being a bad husband.⁸⁸ Akbaruddin says that there are three temples in Ayodhya that claim to be Lord Ram's birthplace. Another legend states that Lord Ram was born in Haryana, in a town called Kaushalyapuram, from which Lord Ram's mother hailed. It was customary for women to go to their parental home in order to give birth to their first child. So if the claim is that Lord Ram was born in three different locations in Ayodhya, and he was also born in Haryana, then Akbaruddin Owaisi asks Advani, Vajpaaye, Uma Bharti, and Prime Minister Modi, all icons of the BJP, "Where all did Ram's mother go? Where exactly did she deliver the child?" The first question challenges the chastity of Lord Ram's mother. "Where all did she go" is another way of saying who all did she sleep with. Akbaruddin Owaisi says that Lord Ram's followers claim he was born thousands of years ago "perhaps 15 lakh years ago;" he claims that these followers do not know the history going back two to four years. "How would they know what happened thousands of years ago?" The crowd roars with delight at the inference that Lord Ram's mother was promiscuous.⁸⁹ Akbaruddin says that when Jethmalani is critical of Lord Ram, no one pays attention, but when Akbaruddin is critical, he is labeled "communalist." This kind of intentionally provocative speech is something Asaduddin must avoid. Asaduddin Owaisi

⁸⁸Ram a 'bad husband' for exiling Sita: Jethmalani. The Hindu. 9 November 2012.

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/ram-a-bad-husband-for-exiling-sita-jethmalani/article4078480.ece>.

⁸⁹ Hyderabad MLA Akbaruddin Owaisi insulted Hindu Lord Rama and his Mother Kaushalya. 04 January 2013. Retrieved 22 November 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FvsIXVDYbC4>.

cannot openly insult Hindu deities though Hindu leaders, such as Uma Bharti (BJP water minister) insults Muslims and their deity.⁹⁰⁹¹ Akbaruddin, on the other hand, as a more local figure, can engage in the more inflammatory discourse. Akbaruddin's rhetoric rallies his local supporters and solidifies his position. This demonstrates the brothers' separate roles. Akbaruddin speaks for the angry and exclusive wing of the Muslim community. Asaduddin speaks for the moderate wing of the community and forms the respectable face of the party. Scholars Robert Pape at the University of Chicago and Jörn-Steffen Pischke at the London School of economics place much of the causes of modern terrorism on an economic or cultural sense of grievance or occupation.⁹²⁹³ India's Muslim minority has a deep and historic sense of grievance, manifesting today in economic and political ghettoization. Akbaruddin vocalizes that grievance. He secures Asaduddin's position by securing the allegiance of the aggrieved.

A further contradiction of Asaduddin Owaisi is that he himself must feed and normalize a narrative of ghettoization. One of the best mental images that Asaduddin draws to is the “टायर के नीचे” or under-the-tire analogy. This can be essentially translated as getting run over by a car. Asaduddin uses the saying in different ways in varying contexts. In the Indian comedic political show *Ap Ki Adalat* आप की अदालत, your court,

⁹⁰ Uma Bharti. Uma Bharti's Generous View on Muslims in a show hosted by a Congressmen Rajeev Shukla. 30 October 2013. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qs5Y17Qm1f8>.

⁹¹ Sita Ranchod-Nilsson and Mary Ann Tetreault. *Women, States and Nationalism: At Home in the Nation?* Routledge Press, New York, NY. 2000.

Pg 106.

⁹² Krueger, Alan. *What Makes a Terrorist?* Foreign and Defense Policy, Society and Culture. 7 November 2007.

⁹³ The Chicago Project on Suicide Terrorism. The University of Chicago. Retrieved 24 November 2016. http://cpost.uchicago.edu/people/director_robert_pape/.

Asaduddin is confronted with his own rhetoric. The moderator questions his uncivilized language and asks, “You said in a speech that everyone and a certain great man are dogs.” Owaisi responds, “That was at our public meeting in Bangalore where six people went crazy and started shooting once or twice, and the police targeted us, but this was a cut-and-paste job from some extinct website in Pakistan...they had said that we would be under the tires.” Owaisi is pointing to the lack of context. The moderator then shows a clip of Owaisi, speaking in his patented AIMIM formatted background, screaming at full volume, “These youth are all dogs, all dogs, the Children of dogs...They call us dogs, they and all their descendants are dogs.” Moderator: “You are from Hyderabad sir, where people are known to be very respectful. You studied in London. Where did you learn such sweet language?” Asaduddin Owaisi:

We learned it by listening to the people, after listening and watching for fifty years without being able to respond. We are compelled to make this more equal. I was speaking about the fifth of December (a reference to the Babri Masjid incident). In Maharashtra, a great leader spoke about fighting Muslims. (These leaders) were calling our relief camps ‘big production centers’ and saying that we were ‘as the children of dogs under the tires.’⁹⁴

This analogy needs a shade of translator’s prerogative. In the case of “great leaders” calling Muslims the children of dogs and going under tires, it would be appropriate to translate this ‘children of dogs’ as ‘sons of bitches’ in English. In the context of Hindu/Urdu languages, the idea of being called a dog or a child of a dog would have a negative connotation; therefore, dog could be generally translated as ‘bitch.’ From Asaduddin’s perspective, when he says they call us dogs, it might be better to translate

⁹⁴ Rajat Sharma. *Ap Ki Adalit* Published 22 September 2014.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ffkf3tosmKw>.

the literal phrase, children of dogs, as ‘puppies.’ The image in India of street dogs, scrapping through trash to survive, and their puppies being crushed under a car tire is a powerful and tangible analogy. Asaduddin Owaisi and Mohammed Ali Jinnah both dealt with this metaphor when considering the Indian Body-Politick. The car is a massive Hindu majority driving India, running over the helpless puppies that are the Indian Muslim minority. Mohammed Ali Jinnah’s main argument in the ‘two-nation-theory’ was that a democratic India would always be driven by the tyranny of the majority, which is Hindu.^{95 96} In contrast, Asaduddin Owaisi and his generation are living that nightmare, and Owaisi must perpetuate the narrative of that nightmare if he has any hope of expanding AIMIM’s reach or effecting positive change for the Muslims of India. In Asaduddin’s answer there is also an Iqbalian slip. Asaduddin Owaisi answered “we” rather than “I.” The question, “where did you learn such sweet language”, is a sarcastic question of Asaduddin’s personal language and conduct. There is no way to confuse this. The question was meant for Asaduddin personally. Asaduddin Owaisi answers with “we.” He assumes the role that Jinnah had and that Iqbal searched for. He answers with a diatribe about the ghettoization of Muslims, not a personal anecdote. Asaduddin Owaisi is normalizing the ghettoization narrative, resentment, and his personal status as the speaker for Muslims in India. Perhaps in separation there is clearer identity and therefore clearer political and social support but with that identity, Asaduddin continues to seek

⁹⁵Guha, Ramchandra. *Indian After Gandhi, The History of the World’s Largest Democracy, Shaking the Centre-minding the minorities.* HarperCollins Publishers, 10 East 53rd St, New York, NY. 2013. Pgs 373-375.

⁹⁶ Jalal, Ayesha. *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan.* Cambridge University press. UK. 1985. Pg 160.

justice beyond the Indian-Muslim community and for the community within the Indian polity.

OBCs

The ghettoization narrative of Asaduddin Owaisi has rhetorical strength with many of India's *Other Backward Castes* (OBC) and *Scheduled Tribes*. In nearly every speech and opportunity, Owaisi brings up Dalit issues, Naga concerns and the conditions of Adivasis. Owaisi incorporates them into his broader sphere of responsibility, whether they know it or not. On a TV debate, Owaisi asks if a Uniform Civil Code would consider a separate legal marriage arrangement for Nagas.⁹⁷ Whether or not that is a concern of most Naga people is uncertain, but by simply mentioning them in answers and statements, Owaisi is casting their lots with his. Asaduddin grafts their situation onto his own reputation. This could have a mutually beneficial relationship for both parties; AIMIM gains votes as OBC issues gain more public awareness. Owaisi vigorously works for OBC issues. In a Lok Sabha debate, Owaisi demands to know why the passports of Muslims and Dalits are being delayed while Hindu passport applications are returned in a timely manner. He is interrupted by another speaker who screams, not allowing Owaisi to speak. Owaisi counters, roaring, "It is Feudalism!"⁹⁸ For Asaduddin Owaisi's dedication, structural issues within AIMIM may prevent it from becoming the party Owaisi claims it to be, a secular big tent for the oppressed. Owaisi claims it is a secular party, but none of

⁹⁷ Halla Bol, NDTV. Asaduddin Owaisi channel, YouTube. 19 October 2016. Retrieved November 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SdnMgfgFdoc>.

⁹⁸ Bhai, Khan. Owaisi fires off Speech in Parliament. 12 August 2015. Published 13 August 2015. Retrieved 19 November 2016. Min 3:20-UTE. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Plr5Ixgl2g>.

the elected representatives of AIMIM are non-Muslims. Farooquee explains that AIMIM did have an Adivasis Mayor of Hyderabad in the past. If so this would still be anecdotal and not part of a greater trend towards inclusion of OBCs. AIMIM, as a pan-Indian-Islamic party, has an issue of keeping the various sects of Islam under one political roof. That must be its priority if it can live up to its name and the antecedents of Owaisi, but must find votes outside of his vote bank to expand the AIMIM base.

Conclusions:

Asaduddin Owaisi's rhetoric is a treasure trove of metaphor and angry analogies that could not possibly be covered in totality in this report. This Owaisi is prone to hyperbole and will certainly resort to petty name calling when angered, but he also can be quite the gentleman in the Lok Sabha. Owaisi does not typically like to speak over other speakers, nor does he erupt from the gallery or interrupt and speak out of turn. One stylistic anecdote is how Owaisi refers to the Prime Minister. In the show *Ap Ki Adalat*, he makes a point of saying that when he criticized Modi he was not criticizing the Prime Minister but rather the Chief Minister of Gujarat "at that time."⁹⁹ In his reference, Owaisi refers to the communal riots in Gujarat as a genocide that the Chief Minister encouraged. He was also one of the politically prominent men who Owaisi called a dog. Prior to Modi's ascension as Prime Minister, Owaisi had pledged to fight it any way he could. After Modi became Prime Minister, Owaisi, continuing to criticize and oppose, adopted a more respectful tone towards the office of the Prime Minister. Owaisi vigorously calls on Modi to make changes, he openly laughs at his hypocrisy and rails against his policies but is nonetheless respectful of the office. In *The Caravan*, Owaisi says this himself.¹⁰⁰ This may be Owaisi adopting an exemplary position in the form of the loyal opposition, which can be applied to the entire Muslim population at one time or another. Asaduddin's faith

⁹⁹ Rajaat Sharma. *Ap Ki Adalat*, Asaduddin Owaisi episode, 22 September 2014. 13:29-13:45. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ffkf3tosmKw&t=1717s>.

¹⁰⁰ Farooquee. Pgs 32-37.

in the democratic process and the Constitution of India are expressed in this. Owaisi is a constitutionalist.

What Owaisi fights for is the promise of India as a secular Nation-State; a promise recorded in the Indian Constitution. In Owaisi's opinion, BJP governments have not lived up to this promise nor has the liberal left. The promises of secularism have been ignored while the Urdu language has suffered an "othering" in the land of its birth. The Muslim personal law is under threat from a non-secular, Hindu nationalist assault. Mosques and places of worship, to include churches and temples, have been destroyed with the Babri Masjid being the most extreme example. Beef bans and cow slaughter bans in Maharashtra, Haryana, Tamil Nadu and Delhi are all done in the name of religion; even the Babri Masjid destruction was done in the name of Lord Ram. Owaisi is not unique in his cooption of religion in to a political agenda. The entire Hindu Nationalist movement, BJP, Shiv Sena, the RSS, VHP, and the Hindu Mahasabha are all non-secular political movements. They represent the broken promises of secularism. This movement is not a Muslim creation, it exists in fact and is not just a concern of the Muslims of India. National Congress Party member, Kerala MP, and former United Nations Under-Secretary General, Shashi Tharoor stated in a Lok Sabha session in 2015, that "today it is safer to be a cow in India than a Muslim in India."¹⁰¹ This is the broader movement of the narrative that Owaisi has not created but has cultivated.

¹⁰¹ All India Press Trust of India, NDTV. 02 December 2015. Retrieved 22 November 2016. <http://www.ndtv.com/india-news/cow-is-safer-than-a-muslim-shashi-tharoor-instantiates-intolerance-in-india-1249942>.

In this paper, the secularism of Owaisi has been discussed. AIMIM and the erstwhile MIM both had coalitions with Congress, and while AIMIM had been a Muslim party, its affiliations were as part of the secular nationalist ideals of Nehru. Even though the AIMIM is marked as Muslim through the religious identity of its leaders, it has projected itself as a unit that creates solidarities among oppressed castes (Dalits), the Tribal communities (Adivasis), and the Muslims. AIMIM, though, is inherently Islamic, and Owaisi has taken on the role not only as spokesman, but also as a reformer of Muslims and Islamic doctrine. He defends the faith, seeks to reform it and places the faithful as his focus. Owaisi's claims to represent these communities have frequently been challenged by Indian Muslims of various stripes—for example, Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi of the ruling BJP and Javed Akhtar, the poet and intellectual who has a Muslim name but who claims to be an atheist.¹⁰² AIMIM's mission statement includes:

*"AIMIM is a political party dedicated to protect and promote the rights of Muslims, Dalits, Adivasis, Other Backward Classes, Other Minorities and all other underprivileged communities in India."*¹⁰³

It is fair to call Owaisi non-secular rather than Islamist or secular though these labels have issues. He would undoubtedly disagree with this. In fact, a study of Owaisi's rhetoric unmask the superficial categories that are taken at their face value too frequently in India. Categories and labels such as secular, religious, communalist,

¹⁰² Twitter Feed of Javed Akhtar retrieved 27 November 2016.
<https://twitter.com/javedakhtarjadu/status/392369675314536448>.

¹⁰³ Mission Statement of AIMIM, Muslimpedia Asaduddin Owaisi profile. Retrieved 04 November 2016.
<http://worldmuslimpedia.com/asaduddin-owaisi>.

constitutionalist, extremist or Islamist are definitions that do not adequately express what people and politicians in South Asia are doing. In a remarkable manner, Owaisi pushes us to think beyond binaries. Owaisi's nuances, beliefs and ideologies, which seem to defy logical conventions, are contradictions that have evolved from a constant need to reinvent himself and his party in an effort to remain relevant. The Islamic community of India adapts to external attacks in the same way that Owaisi incorporates all of these labels in an adaptive manner. Owaisi feels the pulse of the Muslim community and has taken on the representation of its legitimate identity. These labels, perhaps relevant for basic political understanding in a western context, do not precisely identify the processes propelling Owaisi and AIMIM. Asaduddin is an alt-secular, alt-Islamic, constitutional-nationalist. This definition is so laborious that it loses meaning. It is sloppy and imprecise though it would be the most precise under the terms of modern political science. Further, the words themselves are at the mercy of a myriad of agendas whose relevance is suspicious. Essentially, Owaisi redefines and reshapes the Muslim-Indian identity in a fascinating manner.

AIMIM's chances outside of Hyderabad have several key variables that could dictate how far AIMIM and Owaisi can progress. Prime among these are the relationships between being a ghettoized Muslim and being a Muslim that has some benefit in the local order. All politics is local, and for Owaisi to expand AIMIM, he must have a national following in spite of local requirements. In 2017, AIMIM hopes to challenge many civic and legislative posts in Uttar Pradesh (UP). UP is fertile ground for an Islamist expansion. Its cities, Aligarh, Meerut, Muzaffarnagar, and Lucknow all suffer from

communal riots around election time, and while these cities have substantial Muslim minorities, they also have harsh Hindu majorities. These Muslim minorities are ghettoized into neighborhoods with their own civic structures and an underlying economic malaise (perhaps with the exception of Lucknow). Whether or not these civic institutions and the parties that garner their support can be coopted or grafted into the AIMIM apparatus will determine how far AIMIM progresses with the average Muslim voter. Owaisi understands that OBCs and Muslims could present a major obstacle to either Congress or BJP. For Congress, AIMIM is a Muslim alternative to a party, now seen as emasculated on a national power level. That alternative has produced backlash among the existing parties towards Owaisi and the AIMIM.

Both Brass and Varshney explain that Hindu nationalists in Aligarh and Meerut have conducted intentional communal riots, supported by civic structures (IRS) to coalesce voters around their local candidates. If AIMIM has any significant effect in UP, it will be seen as a reason to instigate riots. It could be that this causes a further polarization, giving AIMIM control of the Muslim districts, i.e. ghettoization, but it could also be that the possibility of violence is the excuse to administratively ban AIMIM from UP or from certain cities or districts. It is also possible that Muslims, fearing violence, will not turn out to the polls or remain with Congress and the Rashtriya Janata Dal to prevent violence. Varshney and Brass's work is dated (ending in the 2000s), but acts of communal violence still occur, and the probability of an Institutional Riot System coming into play against AIMIM and Owaisi is high. In the final analysis, from an intelligence perspective, it is possible and highly probable that AIMIM's move into UP will cause

violence, possibly on a large scale (neighborhoods to city wide). The same prevailing wisdom was also true for Bihar, which Varshney noted had a large number of communal violence incidents, but AIMIM's move into Bihar was uneventful and unsuccessful.¹⁰⁴ AIMIM's move into Bihar was only in two remote, rural and Muslim-dominated districts. There, local politics prevailed, and it wasn't enough to claim to speak for all the Muslims. The most likely outcome of Owaisi's expansion is that Congress innovates methods to better represent Muslims within their ranks, thereby deterring AIMIM expansion and reorganizing Congress for a return to the majority.

Even if Owaisi never receives a national government post or if AIMIM fails to expand significantly, Owaisi will, nevertheless, shape the discourse around Muslims in India for generations to come. Asaduddin Owaisi gives voice to the possibility of Muslims voting as a singular bloc and thereby addressing the issues facing their community (ies). Owaisi has fashioned the party into a centrist position that must either be, pulled apart to the poles, or accommodated by the poles. The possibility of AIMIM expanding into UP and further in Maharashtra may be low but tantalizing to contemplate. After all, Modi's rise was unexpected, as was Berlusconi's in Italy, Nigel Farage's in the U.K. or Donald Trump's in the U.S. So too could Owaisi's rise be unexpected and improbable today but nonetheless possible in the future. The shaping of future relations between the communities of India is partially in the hands Asaduddin Owaisi. Even the

¹⁰⁴ Ashutosh Varshney. *Ethnic conflict and Civic Life*. Yale University Press, New Haven CT and London U.K. 2006.

Hindu Nationalist rhetoric against Muslims is being crafted with Owaisi in mind and that has long term effects on India as well.

Owaisi's rise and AIMIM's expansion could be viewed as part of a growing trend of Muslims in the world who are defying Huntington's "Clash of Civilizations" theory.¹⁰⁵ Owaisi is loyal to the idea of India, the Constitution of India, and makes his differences with Pakistan very clear.¹⁰⁶ At times he reminds his audiences of Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the "founder of Pakistan (the world's first nation-state founded in the name of Islam) who had few religious markings as far as his way of life was concerned. Simultaneously, he clings to the idea of a distinction in culture that translates to a distinction in the law. Is Owaisi and his larger movement part of global trends towards less nationalist identities and more towards complex personal identities? Absolutely not! The position in which Owaisi and the Muslims of India find themselves is one in which they were cornered. Owaisi is a defiant nationalist and an adherent of the conceptual construct of the modern nation-state. Iqbal and Jinnah defined their nation as near synonyms to religion and culture; today we would say identity. Notwithstanding the obvious flaws in the idea of a monolithic Islam, Jinnah and Iqbal would not have recognized Owaisi's adherence and loyalty to the secular nation-state of India. Ayesha Jalal makes a reference to the "Artificial Binary Nationalist Idiom" as the framework for

¹⁰⁵ Huntington, Samuel P. "The Clash of Civilization." *Foreign Affairs* Summer 1993: 22-49. Council on Foreign Relations. Web. 25 Nov. 2016.

¹⁰⁶ Owaisi actually traveled to Pakistan and delivered remarks hostile to the Pakistani regime in a live televised debate. Retrieved 22 November 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KHTuOtz4N1E>.

the discourse of India and Pakistan.¹⁰⁷ Owaisi, conflating notions of language (Urdu), caste, class and religion is able to break Jalal's artificial nationalist idiom by being unabashedly nationalist, in terms of birthplace and lineage regardless of the secondary position his people find themselves.

Owaisi may be a part of the growing numbers of Muslims, within secular democracies, defending themselves from political and social aggression as well as outright violence within the legal bounds of their adopted nations.¹⁰⁸ This could include groups like the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) in the U.S. or individuals like Majid Nawaz in the U.K. and will certainly see a rise in the future as millions of refugees move into Western Europe. Owaisi's view of the legal distinctions towards Muslims in democracies is that the universal human injustices that all cultures are guilty of will not be remedied in Islam as long as outside forces continue to disturb it. Paradoxically, Owaisi normalizes the narrative of ghettoization to coalesce Muslims as a major voting bloc in the body-politick of India. Owaisi provides an alternative to the Congress Party's notion that Muslims must be secular first and always supportive of an apathetic Congress. Rajat Sharma told Owaisi, "You have started a fire that will make the house fall." Owaisi said, "I have started a fire to bring down Mulayam Singh Yadav (Congress)."¹⁰⁹ This implies the emasculation of Muslims as much as Owaisi's

¹⁰⁷ Jalal, Ayesha. *Self and sovereignty; individual and community in South Asian Islam since 1850*. New York: Routledge. 2000.

¹⁰⁸ The author, as both an implementer and receiver of actual violence, does not subscribe to a cheapening definition of violence.

¹⁰⁹ Rajat Sharma. *Ap Ki Adalat*, Asaduddin Owaisi episode, 22 September 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ffkf3tosmKw&t=1717s>. 10:00-10:24.

intentions. Sixty-nine years after the Partition, Indian Muslims cannot bring down the house. They are a secondary minority that serves to coalesce a bigoted majority party. As that bigoted majority increases its attacks on Muslims, so Owaisi's movement will increase in numbers, furthering the notion that these are two separate cultures. Owaisi provides Muslims with an alternative but also a method of remaining Muslim and Indian. Mohammed Ali Jinnah would recognize Owaisi and his movement as the very situation he was trying to avoid. Hidden in the rhetoric and demands of Asaduddin Owaisi is the tragic reality that Mohammed Ali Jinnah may have had a point.

Asaduddin Owaisi has given new life to the pan-Indian-Islamic narrative and has caused many Muslims to vote with their community rather than the party of secular nationalism. Owaisi coalesces and defends his Muslim and OBC communities against discriminatory attacks and flagrant injustices in the Indian political system. Asaduddin's significance is best measured in how his political opponents from across the spectrum oppose him. He is a scapegoat who complicates the nationalist rationale of the BJP and he steals votes from the RJD and Congress. Every major political party must adapt to AIMIM's initiatives. His current significance is nothing compared to his potential significance. Asaduddin Owaisi has the narrative, resentment, backing, education, family-ties, potential popular support, and, in the wake of demonetization, a solid window of opportunity to disrupt and reframe Indian politics for generations. Many scenarios are possible but the potential for Hindutva backlash on local Muslims is real and terrifying. The potential for Congress to recast itself to meet Owaisi's demands is also possible but Owaisi will gain more representation for the Muslims of India, which is his primary goal.

Political commentators, intelligence analysts, bankers, religious leaders, and scholars outside of India will come to know Asaduddin's name in the future.

Owaisi's calls for the Muslims to uplift themselves also echo the calls of Muhammad Iqbal (d. 1938), the outstanding poet-philosopher who called on Muslims to raise their status in the eyes of God and the world through action, love, and knowledge acquisition. Owaisi is constantly reminding his audience that in spite of the rhetorical similarities he might have with those who called for the creation of Pakistan, he is a firm believer in the existence of the Indian nation state - a nation state that is fair and just to its minorities and does not succumb to a regressive majoritarian mode of governance.

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